

**The matter must be confirmed by the testimony of two witnesses:** There are two types of witnesses in Jewish law: *attesting* witnesses, who must be present when a particular legal procedure occurs in order for it to be considered legally valid; and *testifying* witnesses, whose purpose is to testify in court that they have witnessed some act, thereby substantiating its factualness. An example of the first type of witnesses is those that must be present at a wedding ceremony or at divorce proceedings in order for these to be valid; an example of the second type of witnesses is the case described in this verse: witnesses to a crime.

Thus, the implication of the words “the matter must be confirmed” in this verse changes subtly when applied to either of these two types of witnesses. In the first case, they mean “the procedure will be considered legally valid”; in the second case, they mean “the act will be considered to have happened.”

The spiritual analogues of these two types of witnesses are the two types of witnesses that attest to and testify to the absolute transcendence of God’s essence. To explain: no testimony per se is required in order to prove the existence of the immanent Divine power that sustains creation; it is enough for us to contemplate the order and operation of nature to deduce that such a power exists. In Job’s words, “By [contemplating] my flesh, I behold God”—just as the soul fills and animates the body, so must there be a Divine energy that fills and animates the universe. No testimony is even required to substantiate the existence of the transcendent Divine power that brings reality into being; just as the mind accepts the reality of immanent Divinity, it understands that that Divinity cannot be the fullest expression of God’s potential. Intellect itself concludes that there must be an aspect of Divinity that transcends our intellect, that lies beyond our ken.

What does require testimony is the notion that God’s essence is totally abstract, that it is beyond not only our ability to understand but our ability to conceive. The veracity of this notion must be established by “witnesses” because there is no logical imperative that this should be the case.

There are two types of witnesses to this notion: attesting and testifying. The Torah refers to “heaven and earth” as God’s testifying witnesses. Relative to individual human beings, heaven and earth evince infinity. The heavenly bodies exist “eternally,” that is, not exhibiting any discernible change throughout the generations, and although the individual creatures of earth do not live forever, their species persist “forever,” that is, again, without any discernible change throughout the generations. Thus, heaven and earth testify that there is a (relatively) infinite power embedded within creation, and since all creation is created by God, this relative infinity must derive from a true infinity within God, indicating that there is an aspect of God that is infinitely beyond our ability to conceive.

The Torah’s attesting witnesses to the inconceivable nature of God’s essence are the Jewish people. Whereas heaven and earth only *testify* to God’s infinity, the Jewish people *attest* this infinity, i.e., they actualize it, so to speak. By studying the Torah and performing God’s commandments, the Jewish people introduce the ineffability of God’s essence into the physical world, paradoxically accomplishing the categorically impossible feat of expressing what is by nature inexpressible in this finite world.

Herein lies the subtle difference between the testimony offered by heaven and earth and the attestation offered by the Jewish people. While the testimony of heaven and earth does indeed allow the world to appreciate God’s infinity, it does not necessarily imply that the universe cannot exist apart from God. In contrast, the attestation of God’s infinity expressed by our study of the Torah and fulfillment of the commandments implies explicitly that God’s existence is the only true existence, that all other forms of existence are contingent upon His and that “nothing exists besides Him.”

These two types of witness are reflected in the different ways we can approach our Divine mission in life. Most aspects of this mission make perfect sense, and therefore, a cursory reflection on the nature of human life, at most, is required to motivate us to dedicate ourselves to this mission enthusiastically. Furthermore, even the occasional need for self-sacrifice can for the most part be well-understood logically, since logic can admit that it is sometimes necessary

to override logic, resorting to supra-logical means to accomplish logical ends. But the highest form of dedication to our Divine mission is unlimited, unconditional self-sacrifice that ignores logic altogether. Such self-sacrifice can only stem from the sense of self-identification with God that is wholly beyond the ability of the intellect to conceive.

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